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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the proceedings of a 1996 workshop on modern language teaching, sponsored by the Council of Europe. It first outlines the workshop's aims to examine relevant recent research in Europe, suggest policy concerning language teaching and language teacher training, and encourage cooperation among researchers and their institutions. Opening speeches are summarized, commissioned papers are cited, national and individual reports are listed, and the procedure for group work is noted. Three working groups discussed these issues: early foreign language instruction; bilingual education; factors affecting language learning and teaching; native language use in second language instruction; the role of grammar instruction; cognitive style; the relationship between assessment procedures and language teaching methodology; innovative programs; conditions supporting language teaching; the learner as individual and active participant; research priorities and directions; the purposes and contribution of research; outcomes measurement; and teaching skills. Conclusions are drawn in each of these areas. A list of participants and the report of each working group are appended. (MSE)

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ED 415 720

Strasbourg, 22 April 1996
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COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION

Educational Research Workshop on the effectiveness of modern language learning and teaching Graz (Austria), 5-8 March 1996

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SECRETARIAT REPORT

prepared by

**the Directorate of Education, Culture and Sport,
Higher Education and Research Division,
Research Section**

1. NATURE OF THE MEETING

An Educational Research Workshop, organised by the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz (Austria), in co-operation with the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC) and the Centre for School Development in Graz.

2. PLACE AND DATES

Graz (Austria), 5-8 March 1996.

3. THEME

Effectiveness of modern language learning and teaching.

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4. AIMS OF THE WORKSHOP

4.1 To contribute to the CDCC's Project on "Language learning and European citizenship", by taking stock of research results available in Europe.

4.2 To suggest action to be taken by policy-makers and institutions responsible for initial and in-service education and training of teachers.

4.3 To encourage co-operation among participating research workers and their institutions.

5. PARTICIPANTS

See attached list (Appendix I).

6. OPENING OF THE WORKSHOP

Professor Dr. KETTEMANN (Austria) agreed to take the Chair.

The participants were welcomed by:

- Dr. Dagmar HEINDLER (Austria) on behalf of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs (Centre for School Development);
- Mr. Claude KIEFFER on behalf of the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz;
- Mr. Michael VORBECK on behalf of the Council of Europe's Research Section; and
- Prof. Dr. KETTEMANN as Chairman.

Dr. HEINDLER warmly welcomed the participants, the lecturers, the General Rapporteur and Dr. Michael VORBECK on behalf of the Austrian Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs and thanked Mr. Alfred STINGL, the Mayor of Graz, for his generous support of the Conference. She pointed out that Austria had a long-standing tradition of investing great efforts into the improvement of its language education programmes and that it had been actively involved in the Council of Europe's work on modern languages for a long time. She also stressed that the creation of the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe in Graz was another example of Austria's interest in language learning and in facilitating co-operation and partnership throughout Europe.

Mr. KIEFFER expressed his warmest thanks to the Austrian Federal authorities, Styria and the City of Graz for their Commitment and their continual support, without which the project of a European Centre for Modern Languages would not have succeeded. He listed the Centre's priorities as from 1997 (based on the Conclusions of the Centre's first annual Colloquy held in December 1995):

- autonomous language learning and teacher trainer education;
- impact of the new information and communication technologies on language learning and teacher education;
- the intercultural dimension;
- authenticity (of methods and materials);
- aspects of language policy in Europe.

Mr. VORBECK thanked the Austrian authorities, in particular the Centre for School Development, and the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages, for having accepted to prepare, organise and finance the present Workshop. He drew attention to the aspects to be discussed (document DECS/Rech (95) 6 revised, item 3) for the benefit of the Council of Europe's Project on "Language Learning and European citizenship":

- evaluation and testing;
- early modern language learning;
- role of classroom environment/school and out-of-school contacts;
- success of differing approaches to language learning;
- role of mother tongue, second language and foreign language; conditions of success;
- intelligence, social class and social environment: measurable effects on success.

7. ORGANISATION OF THE WORKSHOP

7.1 Commissioned papers

The following commissioned papers were presented in plenary session and discussed in three working groups:

7.1.1 **THE VALUE OF RESEARCH AND EVALUATION IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION (Keynote Address)/LA VALEUR DE LA RECHERCHE ET DE L'EVALUATION DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE LANGUES (Discours liminaire)** by **Prof J. Charles ALDERSON**, Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language, University of Lancaster (DECS/Rech (96) 6)

7.1.2 **QUANTIFYING LANGUAGE ABILITY/LA QUANTIFICATION DE L'APTITUDE LINGUISTIQUE** by/par **Dr. Gunther SIGOTT**, Assistant Professor, University of Klagenfurt, Department of English and American Studies (DECS/Rech (96) 8)

7.1.3 **SUCCESS OF DIFFERING APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE LEARNING (METHODS)/SUCCES DES DIFFERENTES APPROCHES DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT DES LANGUES (METHODES)** by/par **Prof. Dr. Reinhold FREUDENSTEIN**, Informationszentrum für Fremdsprachenforschung (DECS/Rech (96) 4)

7.1.4 **APPRENTISSAGE PRECOCE DES LANGUES VIVANTES - Critères de succès/EARLY MODERN LANGUAGE LEARNING - Conditions of success** by/par **M. Denis GIRARD**, Inspecteur général honoraire, Paris (DECS/Rech (96) 3)

7.1.5 **EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE/L'APPRENTISSAGE PRECOCE DES LANGUES ETRANGERES: LA PERSPECTIVE BIOLOGIQUE** by/par **Prof. Dr. Annemarie PELTZER-KARPF**, Department of English, University of Graz (DECS/Rech (96) 7)

7.1.6 **THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING/LE ROLE DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT DANS L'APPRENTISSAGE DES LANGUES** by/par **Dr. Irma HUTTUNEN**, University of Oulou, Department of Teacher Education (DECS/Rech (96) 2)

7.1.7 **INTELLIGENCE, CLASSE SOCIALE ET CONTEXTE SOCIAL - EFFETS MESURABLES SUR LE SUCCES DANS L'APPRENTISSAGE DES LANGUES ETRANGERES A L'ECOLE/INTELLIGENCE, SOCIAL CLASS CONTEXT - MEASURABLE EFFECTS ON SUCCESS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AT SCHOOL (with Bibliography and Annexe 1)** by/par **Dr. Paul BOGAARDS**, Faculty of Arts, University of Leiden (DECS/Rech (96) 5)

7.2 National and/or individual reports

National and/or individual reports were submitted by participants from:

- **ALBANIA (DECS/Rech (96) 21),**
- **BULGARIA (DECS/Rech (96) 15),**
- **DENMARK (DECS/Rech (96) 12),**
- **GREECE (DECS/Rech (96) 13),**
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- **SWITZERLAND (DECS/Rech (96) 17),**
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(Copies may be obtained from the Secretariat.)

7.3 Group work

The various papers were discussed in three groups reporting back to the plenary session. Their reports are attached (Appendices II (with Addendum), III and IV).

8. CONCLUSIONS

From the research findings tabled at the meeting and summed up by the Rapporteur General, Mr. Peter DICKSON, the following conclusions may be drawn:

8.1 State of the art

There is research:

- into how languages are learnt;
- into what influences teaching and learning;
- which investigates teaching and learning itself.

This area of research has, however, low prestige and suffers from lack of funds and co-ordination. To measure the effectiveness of modern language learning and teaching is a highly complex task, and there is no agreed model of learning to guide the research effort.

8.2 Curriculum

There are often considerable discrepancies between intended, implemented and achieved curriculum. What is taught in the classroom does not necessarily correspond to the learning objectives defined by the Ministry; what is achieved does not always correspond to the expected outcome. Research has a part to play in investigating such discrepancies.

8.3 Organisation of language learning and time allocation

Effectiveness also depends on organisational factors, e.g. whether or not there is a national assessment system, and on time allocation. Intensive teaching units have sometimes been found to be more effective than long time spans stretching over many years and based on a fixed number of weekly hours. Some form of national evaluation and monitoring of standards is essential to assess the effectiveness of provision and organisation.

8.4 Aims and objectives/standards

Effectiveness needs to be judged with reference to agreement among policy-makers and parents on specific goals to be achieved at the different grades and the percentage of pupils supposed to achieve them. Standards of attainment should be transparent to pupils. A pluralist view of success which recognises the value of intermediate standards is necessary.

8.5 Innovations

Innovatory pilot experiments are a vital step towards increasing effectiveness of learning and teaching, provided they are organised in a principled way, the change properly managed and accompanied and evaluated by research. However, it must be recognised that the incorporation of reforms into practice is achieved only through the mediation of teachers.

8.6 Types of research to be stimulated

Fundamental research (into how people learn a language) needs to be supplemented by applied research, investigating the conditions of success in a given situation. For example, in the case of early modern language learning judgements need to take account of both cognitive and biological developments, as well as social, environmental and educational conditions.

8.7 Factors influencing effectiveness of language learning

Research stresses in particular the individual differences of learners, psychological factors (e.g. interest in the suggestopaedic method which, however, remains controversial), personal and social development, motivation and attitudes, distance between first language and target language, learning environment (encouraging classroom atmosphere without intimidation), learner-centred rather than didactic approaches (teacher acting as facilitator),

opportunities for using the language, quality and quantity of input in the target language. There is no general prescription possible to indicate how much teaching should be done in the target language as the learning situation is so variable.

8.8 Evaluation and testing

Explicit criteria for assessing all skills should be made available to policy-makers, teacher trainers, teachers and pupils. Many examinations do not reliably measure outcomes of language learning. Examinations are not comparable across national systems.

8.9 Early modern language learning: conditions of success

There is some research evidence suggesting that language learning is more effective the earlier it starts, provided teachers are adequately prepared, and well qualified, the language teaching is integrated into the curriculum as a whole and there is continuity and co-ordination with the next stage of schooling. However experience in one context is not always transferable to another.

8.10 Success of different methods of learning and teaching

Heterogeneous classrooms require combining different methods and individualised teaching, group work, etc. Pupils should be given challenging tasks slightly above their actual level of performance. A good modern language teacher takes account of different learner types, incorporates a variety of teaching strategies, offers a rich environment of language input conducive to learning and creates opportunities for pupils to develop their own learning style.

8.11 Role of mother tongue, second language and foreign language

As far as possible, basic literacy should be taught in the mother tongue. Bilingual education (i.e. part of the subject matter taught in a second language or foreign language) only makes sense if teachers are sufficiently prepared and co-operate in teams, and if adequate teaching and learning material has been developed.

8.12 Messages for policy and practice

It is necessary to:

- improve the dialogue between research and practice;
- disseminate research findings in a language understandable to teachers and referring to their concerns;

- ensure that the lessons of pilot experiments are properly carried through;
- consider that languages are different, presenting different challenges to different learners;
- create a code of good assessment practice, supportive to the learners;
- define success in a pluralistic way;
- remain realistic (the highest standards cannot be attained by all);
- support teachers and learners rather than judge them;
- challenge learners;
- focus on interlanguage, i.e. recognise the place of errors that pupils make.

APPENDIX I/ANNEXE I

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APPENDIX II

GROUP 1

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Rapporteur : Germaine FORGES

1. Foreign language teaching at an early age

1.1 At what age is it wise to start teaching foreign languages?

Taking into account the conclusions of neurobiological research, it would seem that it is important to start teaching foreign languages as early as possible, **that is to say, by the age of four**.

1.2 What qualifications are deemed necessary for the teaching of foreign languages at an early age?

The teacher does not simply have to be highly skilled linguistically (the quality of the phonological model is important), but he must also have had the pedagogical training necessary for working with this age group.

2. Bilingual Teaching

2.1 For bilingual teaching, should pupils be selected and on the basis of which criteria available to all.

Some countries which offer bilingual teaching operate a form of selection based on tests to establish knowledge of the mother tongue and of mathematics. So there exist "elitist" paths which cannot be opened up to all; perhaps geographical areas could be proposed where schools or groups of schools would offer a bilingual education to **all** the pupils of that area.

2.2 What benefits can be obtained by teaching another subject in a foreign language?

This type of teaching is a preferred means of developing linguistic competence in all its aspects because the contents are at the heart of classroom activities.

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3. Parameters which affect language teaching/learning

These parameters are numerous and difficult to classify. The following seem to be vital factors in the effectiveness of foreign language teaching:

- the personal motivation of the pupil and/or the capacity of the teacher to stimulate this motivation;

- the adaptation to his personality of the teacher's approach (learning profiles, cognitive styles, different types of understanding);

- working methods within the classroom ("pair work").

4. Two recurring problems found in foreign language education

4.1 Usage/status of the mother tongue in language teaching/ learning.

In this field, the era of dogmatism is past. One principle seems to be the rule: use the mother tongue as much as necessary and as little as possible.

4.2 Can a foreign language be taught without teaching grammar?

The growing awareness of the consistencies of a language accelerates the learning; this awareness should increase with the observation of occurrences within the language which are not necessarily brought about by creating rules or by using very elaborate grammatical terminology.

A few recommendations to conclude

In relation to the central theme of our discussions, the effectiveness of foreign language teaching/learning, it seems that:

- Schools remain the ideal places for preparing the ground for learning a foreign language, but they should not be satisfied with what already exists; faced with the challenges of internationalisation, faced with the increased demands of mobility and professional qualifications to which the knowledge of one or more languages is a strong contributory factor, they must display their ambition by proposing foreign language training which includes the current success formulas : teaching from an early age, bilingual teaching, teaching another subject in a foreign language, intensive teaching which is not just reserved for a minority.

- This ambition makes the assumption that the means are available, especially in the vital field of teacher training. Teachers must be perceived as professionals by the public.

- The increased professionalism of teachers also implies that the fruits and achievements of research should be "received" by teachers in a language which is accessible and workable.

The effectiveness of language teaching is certainly not cheap, but it is priceless.

GROUP 1

ADDENDUM

SOME POINTS OF DISPUTE

by

Anne-Claude BERTHOUD

The ambitions of schools: realism or idealism ?

The Workshop participants did not all agree on how ambitious schools should be with regard to language teaching. Some felt that it was important to be realistic rather than idealistic and not to expect schools to produce what their specific nature clearly prevented them from producing, i.e. genuine communicative competence involving all low-level elements (phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactical rules) and high-level elements (enunciative, discursive, interactional, encyclopedic and strategic operations).

The risk in aiming too high was that expectations would be disappointed, thus seeming to justify the criticisms levelled at schools.

In contrast, the other participants felt that, if schools lowered their objectives, they would be admitting defeat and conceding their inability to meet the challenges of education in the future. It was important not to level schools down by taking account of pupils' potential difficulties in this way. Pupils needed to be placed in challenging situations in order to encourage them to surpass themselves and thus give them a positive impression of the learning process.

Cognitive styles: a means or an end in learning ?

While all the Workshop participants agreed that it was important in language learning to take account of the differences in cognitive styles, the question of the actual way they should be dealt with remained open. Was it merely a question of recognising the diversity of methods of learning, and of teachers taking account of them and adapting to them so as to make the most of the learners' "natural" abilities ? In that case, the diversity of cognitive styles would be seen as a springboard or a facilitator in learning and would thus be a means and not an end.

Or, on the other hand, should the question of cognitive styles be looked at in a more focused manner, i.e. in the sense of certain cognitive styles being more effective than others given the constraints of the school environment ? Pupils' success would thus to some extent depend on their strategies being in line with those of the existing educational culture,

which clearly favoured the analytical approach. In this case, the purpose of taking account of the differences in learning strategies would be to offer pupils "compensatory strategies" to enable them to change their own methods and thus make it easier for them to meet the expectations of schools in terms of educational and social success.

Here, the question of learning strategies would concern not only the means, but also the aims of learning.

Role of grammar: reflection or conceptualisation ?

The discussions demonstrated the importance now generally attached to grammar in the learning process. However, doubts remained about the degree of control required and what it should cover.

As far as the former was concerned, some participants felt that awareness of how the relevant language worked was enough, and there was no need for explanations involving precise metalinguistics. The main activity would thus be reflection, without any real conceptualisation.

Other participants believed that pupils should be offered transparent and clear metalinguistic explanations that served as practical tools in the development of linguistic and communicative skills.

With regard to the area the reflection should cover, some participants were more convinced than others of the need for it to be a complex one running through all levels of linguistic analysis and not only the linguistic level in the strict sense. Accordingly, it was just as important for it to include the high-level elements, which were the very ones that posed problems in terms of the effective use of a language in the wide range of situations that existed. From this perspective, schools were ideal "laboratories", not for speaking, but for preparing learners for communication by enabling them to observe the most fundamental mechanisms of language, which could be regarded as "keys" to speaking and learning to speak a language.

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APPENDIX III

GROUP 2

Chair: **Prof. Mag. Franz SCHIMEK**
Rapporteur: **Dr. Charles MIFSUD**

The relationship between assessment procedures and ML education

- What is the extent of the influence that assessment procedures exercise on ML teaching methodology and learning?

  The connection between testing and methodology is still somewhat unclear and tenuous.

  We need more focussed investigation into such issues as, for example, washback testing effects.

  Action research where the teacher is also the researcher may shed further light on the links between testing and language learning.

- Attempts need to be made to seek ways of reducing anxiety levels where assessment procedures are concerned.

  The assessment process can be rendered more interactive and democratic through increased involvement on the part of the learner.

  Also the individual needs of different learners must be built into the assessment process.

Innovation programmes

- How do we best sustain innovations in ML teaching and learning?
  We need to establish partnerships and networks between policy makers, administrators, teachers, learners, parents, researchers and others.

  In-service education has an important role to play in this regard.

  It is, however, important that the stakeholders, especially teachers, are involved closely in both the planning and process of INSET.

  Any programme of innovation in ML education needs to incorporate a research framework. This should afford opportunities for an on-going process of crticial evaluation and for the dissemination of results, which may have implications for both policy and practice.

Early ML Education

- There is some evidence to support early ML education, given suitable conditions.

  There is broad consensus amongst researchers, policy-makers, teachers and others about the benefits of bilingual eduation. In certain countries measures should be taken to raise public awareness about such issues, especially through the media.

- The appropriate time for the introduction of early (i.e. before ten years of age) ML education depends partially on biological factors.

However, we need to investigate further other factors which interact with the early introduction of a modern language, e. g. social and attitudinal factors. Consideration needs to be given to which aspects of research findings can be transferred from one situation to the other.

The role of the mother tongue teacher

- Some questions remain about the role of the mother tongue teacher in early ML education - transmission of early literacy through the mother tongue, the enhancing effect of second language learning on the subsequent learning of other languages.

Conditions for ML education

- There is a need to maximize conditions conducive to ML learning. These include: appropriate teaching materials, teacher education, organisational framework, assessment policies, and co-operation amongst the stakeholders.

- Progress needs to be made towards the successful implementation of agreed European policies for ML education. We recognize the enhanced employment opportunities offered by the working knowledge of a number of modern languages.

The learner as an individual and active participant

- More attention needs to be given to the learner as an individual and active participant within the teaching and learning process.

- The nature of effective feedback needs to be researched further.

Research priorities and directions

- Priorities and directions for research need to be established after taking stock of current research findings.

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APPENDIX IV

GROUP 3

Chair: Mr. Michael LYMCH
Rapporteur: Ms Hannah KAISER

RESEARCH

The purposes and contribution of research

- To change and innovate at the following levels:
- curriculum design/materials/testing/teaching strategies,etc.
- To support the teaching profession(?)

Dissemination of research results

- Via materials/methods
- Pre-service/In-service training, etc.

CONCLUSION

Attempts need to be made to bring together researchers/policy-makers/teachers/teacher educators/learners to work on project design

VALIDITY

In the context of assessing skills at the end of compulsory schooling, the following were considered to be important

- Explicit criteria for assessing all skills should be made available to teachers, teacher educators, pupils and policy-makers
- Sample materials, e.g. audio tapes/video tapes of typical performance at various grades are required (models)
- In order to facilitate this, adequate resource-funding is called for

CONCLUSIONS

- The need to identify national and Europe-wide research agendaswith guarantees of a co-ordinated approach and appropriate financing
- Greater concern for validity in our measurement of outcomes

EARLY LANGUAGE-LEARNING AND BILINGUAL SCHOOLING

CONCLUSIONS

- Bilingual schooling is desired by all member states
- Starting age - as early as possible - varies according to national education system
- Pilot scheme for bilingual schooling desired in all member states
- Project period of 8 years to allow for differences in national education systems (Definition of bilingual schooling in terms of pilot project- L1 & ML)

- Research into appropriate teaching and learning strategies
- Evaluation of linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes by means of appropriate measuring instruments
- Importance of thorough language competence in FL of teachers involved
- Implications for teacher training

THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT

The need for

- Training of teachers in communicative competence (Bachmann model et al)
- Research into meaning-focussed teaching - is it taking place and, if so, to what extent?
- Meaning-focussed pre-service training and on-going Inset

Qualities of a good ML teacher may include

- being able to take account of different learner types
- being able to incorporate a wide variety of teaching strategies
- Offer a rich environment conducive to learning of ML
- Create contexts in which students can develop own learning style

CONCLUSION

The need for classroom-based research into effectiveness of ML learning and teaching (Relationship between what teachers do and how learners learn)

RESEARCHER

- Those driven by curiosity
- Those who are instrumentally motivated
- Those who wish to improve and innovate

CONCLUSION

To raise the status of applied research!

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